

Czech media on the EC annual report – 11 October 2002

- In the beginning of the week and mainly on **Wednesday the 9th** there are the first articles relating to the report in the leading newspapers expressing the expectations that the report will be kind to Czech republic and also there appear the first leaks from the report itself.
- The main message is that the CR is prepared and will be ready to enter the EU in the beginning of 2004. Political criteria – ok, economic ones will be ok until 2004 and also the implementation of *acquis* will not be an obstacle. Biggest problems mentioned by the report are expected to be: corruption, economic criminality, status of the Romany minority, public finances. Major task to be resolved before 2004 should be subsidies to farmers.
- It's also discussed in detail what's going to happen if the referendum in Ireland will refuse the Nice treaty.
- On **Thursday the 10th** the report is officially released. Main problems of the CR remain: corruption complicating the work of the administration, police, medical care, banks, judiciary and intelligence; racist criminal offences are not prosecuted properly; Romanies are discriminated in the matters of employment, education and housing; CR didn't ratify the European Social Charter; registration of newly established companies is too long; bad bankruptcy law, protection of the creditors not sufficient; commercial register not transparent enough; implementation of the new state-service law is delayed; duty-free shops at the borders were not closed down; the VAT is not in balance with the excise taxes;
- Newspapers also mention that in the ladder of candidate countries CR is on one of the last places having completed just 25 out of the total number of 30 negotiation chapters.
- All the leading politicians express their satisfaction with the report but speak also about other necessary steps to be done.
- The commentaries on the report and on the accession from 10th October, the day of official publication of the report, are well summed up in at the CTK official website so I'm attaching it:

- 10.10.

PRAGUE, Oct 10 (CTK) - All Czech dailies today focus on the EC's annual assessment report which was released in Brussels on Wednesday and which names the Czech Republic among the ten candidates which are capable of entering the EU in 2004.

The Czech Republic is expected to finish their entry negotiations by the end of the year.

"We've already half-entered the EU now, when the difficult beginnings of EU entry negotiations are ending. However, this is a mere end of a beginning," **Michal Mocek** writes in **Mlada fronta Dnes**, in reaction to the "enlargement report" which the EC approved on Wednesday.

By entering the EU, the Czech Republic can gain more than a couple of extra billion euros. The EU means a chance, an opportunity. It will benefit those who are capable of using it. The situation of the incapable will definitely not worsen after the entry, but they will only watch other nations, more active and capable ones, gaining more from the EU than the obligatory financial subsidies from Brussels, Mocek writes.

"It is the turn of each of us now. The question is whether and how each of us will manage to use the chance named Europe. We should think over it already now and prepare for the opportunity which

seems within the reach now," Mocek writes.

"The EC's statement about the preparedness of ten countries to enter the EU might be engraved in history as the date when a new big power was conceived," **Pavel Masa** writes in **Lidove noviny**.

However, much European money as well as sacrifices on the part of the newcomers are yet needed for the big power to come to being, Masa writes.

The EU does not conceal its apprehensions about its well- doing organism's merger with the alien element embodied by the relative poor [newcomer] countries. That is why the Brussels report includes, for the first time in history, a security clause under which a country's integration can be temporarily frozen if it fails to perform in accordance with requirements, Masa writes.

Wednesday's decision thus means no final verdict. Europe has sent out a clear message that everything is up to the candidates now. Either they will become part of the world's biggest single market, but they will have to endure many unpleasant things in this case, or they will be left outside. Brussels is ready to pay for many things, but there are certain limits of this, the EU's message reads, according to Masa.

Is the EU really prepared for the admission of the ten selected candidates? **Martin Denmark** asks in the daily **Hospodarske noviny**.

If the candidates drew up a joint assessment report on the enlargement preparedness of the EU's Brussels headquarters, similar to those which Brussels gives to the candidates every year, it would feature numerous reservations, Denmark writes.

Forecast analyses which estimate post-enlargement developments are not much optimistic. They speak about a hard clash with reality, about poor competitiveness of Eastern European companies, and of the unawareness of people in the candidate countries, of whom some have not a clue over what they can expect as EU members, Denmark writes.

Simultaneously, EU officials worry about the Irish who are going to vote - for the second time - on the Nice Treaty on which the whole enlargement is based. Uncertainty in Brussels' decision making confirms that the EU has underestimated its own preparations. This is also confirmed by many member countries' fears of the competition and "hungry mouths" from the East, Denmark continues.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, the EU made a political gesture towards the membership seekers, but it has not yet offered them real partnership. That is why the continent is still divided into those who dictate conditions and those who can discuss the conditions but finally have to accept them, Denmark writes.

The Western border is no longer blocked to Eastern citizens and companies, who however, are afflicted by often sophisticated networks of discriminatory regulations, quotas and customs tariffs, Denmark writes.

The enlargement is not only a great historic event but also a lobbyists' fight for money and advantages. Not to speak of nationalists who incite the lobbies and encourage them to exert even stronger pressure. Europe is - not prepared for this situation, Denmark says.

- On **Friday the 11th** the Czech media are quoting spokesman to president Havel, Ladislav Spacek who said on Thursday that the good rating of CR is the success of Zeman's government and that hopefully Spidla will carry it on. Havel (and also PM Spidla and the chairmen of both parliamentary chambers Zaoralek and Pithart) were given the report on Wednesday by EC Ambassador Cibrian.
- In LN there's a commentary by Pavel Masa stating that in geopolitical terms and foreign policy the EU lacks strong common ideas. Some analysts hope that with new members the foreign orientation of EU will turn more pro-American way, because the EU by delaying the enlargement has substantially weakened the

European enthusiasm of these countries down. CR should realize that its foreign policy can't be fully independent anymore and should be careful about statements such as those of Zeman in Israel or Tvrdik with his acceptance of American anti-missile protection without any consultation with other allies.

- Michal Mocek in MFD writes that enlargement of 10 candidate countries is also opening the door for other South and Eastern European states, such as Macedonia or Croatia.